Sir Rabindranath Tagore.

LIFE OF RABINDRANATH TAGORE.

RABINDRANATH TAGORE is the son of the celebrated Mâharishi Devendranath Tagore and was born in 1861. The Tagore family is one of the most ancient Bengali families. The poet's grandfather, Prince Dwarkanath Tagore, visited England during Queen Victoria's reign and had a most cordial reception at court. The members of the Maharishi's family are all distinguished. The eldest son, Dwijendranath Tagore, is a great philosopher who is so full of gentleness and love, "that the squirrels come from the boughs and climb on to his knees and the birds alight upon his hands." The second son was the first Indian to enter the Indian Civil Service. The poet's cousins, Gaganendranath Tagore and Abanindranath Tagore, are great artists. One of the Maharishi's daughters conducts the *Bharati* magazine. The purity and spirituality of the poet's father's life are well known to all. These traits are to be found in Rabindranath Tagore in perfection and have contributed to make his poems great moral and spiritual forces besides their sheer artistic excellence. His love of meditation, and the cloistral repose and seclusion of his life,

have enabled him to perceive truths that are not visible to the ordinary eyes.

That heredity and environment go far to emphasize the special tendencies of the soul have thus been well exemplified in this great poet's life. As a boy he did not like school life, and early acquired the habit of self-education. He did not go to a college but all through life has been disciplining himself in a unique manner intellectually, morally, and spiritually. His earliest poems were written when he was very young, but they received little encouragement. He then went to England to study law but came back to India as he did not find the study of law congenial to him. Since then he has written various poems that have made his name universally known and loved. He wrote exquisite love poetry in his youth. He had a great sorrow in his thirty-fifth year. "After that his art grew deeper, it became religious and philosophical." He has written also various plays and novels and philosophical works. His patriotism and the practical bent of his genius are clear from his conducting a large school at Bolepur, though one who merely reads his writings might regard him as solely a visionary and a poet. The school contains about two hundred pupils, who are instructed in the open air. He has trained his staff of teachers. Bolepur is about ninety-three miles from Calcutta and is almost surrounded by a dry extensive waste. His father and he have planted trees there. The place has apparently been chosen as a suitable place for meditation and

repose. The school has become famous. It is said that the poet often used during his youth to soak his boots with water so that he might fall ill and be spared the trouble of going to school. His object in founding the Bolepur school was to educate boys in an agreeable manner. His translations of his poems into exquisite English prose have won for him a European reputation, and he was awarded in 1913 the Nobel Prize for Literature. His works now translated and published in English are : *Gitanjali*, *My Reminiscences*, *The Gardener*, *The Crescent Moon*, *The King of the Dark Chamber*, *Post Office*, *Chitra*, *Sadhana*, *One Hundred Poems of Kabir*, *Fruit Gathering (a Sequel to Gitanjali)*, *Stray Birds*, *Lover's Gift and Crossing*, *Sacrifice and other plays*, *the Cycle of Spring*, *Hungry stones and other stories*, *Nashi and other stories. At Home and Abroad*, *Personality and Nationalism*. Innumerable poems and essays and stories by him have been translated and printed. Mr. Ernest Rhys says : "The copy of his collected poems—a curious, attractive-looking, large quarto bound in plain crimson boards without adornment, printed with the cursive Bengali type in double columns, and published at Calcutta—serves as a very tantalising reminder of the amount of his verse that is still untranslated."

As was remarked by the *Statesman* : "The honour conferred upon him sets the seal of international recognition upon his poetic genius." The Nobel Prize is awarded to "the most distinguished work of an idealistic tendency

in the field of literature," and every reader of Tagore's poems can well realise how worthy he is of the great honour thus conferred on him. With characteristic patriotism and unselfishness, he has devoted the entire prize amount of £8,000 to the Bolepur School. The Degree of Doctor of Literature was conferred on him by the Calcutta University in December 1913. Though he was knighted he returned his distinction to H. E. Lord Chelmsford the Viceroy as a protest against the Punjab tragedy in 1919. His action in sending a Sanskrit poem through the Rev. C. F. Andrews to cheer up the struggling Indian heroes in South Africa, his refusal to deliver lectures in Canada till it learned to respect India as an equal and self-respecting member of the British Empire, and his other acts of patriotic service, coupled with his great literary work, show how his is a life full of purity, patriotism, and deep spiritual passion.

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS.

The chief characteristics that strike our imagination and kindle love for him in our hearts are the sweetness of his nature, his modesty, his gentleness, and his unselfishness. His is a profoundly religious temperament, and hence it was that the loss of his wife and two children did not sour his nature but made his outlook on life full of love and compassion. It is said of him that when he falls ill, he bears his sufferings meekly and uncomplainingly and never talks of them to others. He is of a very obliging disposition, and is very

regular in his correspondence and replies to all his correspondents in his own handwriting.

He is acknowledged on all hands to be a handsome man. In his youth he was a leader of fashion in Bengal. His face indicates a devout and spiritual nature and is full of true attractiveness. It is said, "He has the high forehead of a thinker, a flowing beard, flashing eyes, and a distinguished appearance." He is very fond of singing, which is his chief recreation. It is said, "Often he has been heard singing from early morning till late at night, with only a break of an hour or so for meals at noon." He is very fond of swimming and rowing.

It is very interesting to learn about his ways of writing poems and composing songs. It is said that he hums his verses over to himself before writing them down. It is said :—

> He takes considerable pains over composing the first line of a poem, and the rest seems to flow without any effort. He has no fixed hours for composing verses. During the rainy season, however, he finds his work more congenial than at any other time of the year. Mr. Tagore writes a very good hand and seldom corrects what he has once written. When he cannot help making some correction, he usually cuts the wrong word or sentence very lightly with a pencil or pen. Mr. Tagore is a most prolific writer, and if all his manuscripts were put together they would fill a small bookshelf.

His love of repose, seclusion, and contemplation has led him to select Bolepur as his residence, as Bolepur has been described as "pre-eminently a poet's abode and a place for contemplation." He said in his address, at Japan, on 11th June

1916: "For the most part of my life I have cultivated writing poetry, and you know that poetic imagination is a shy-bird, it builds its nest in seclusion, away from the eyes of the multitude." The very name of his residence *Shantiniketan* (the abode of peace) is significant. In an age when even the most balanced and cultured minds feel an irresistible desire to keep themselves continually before the public gaze and win public applause, it is a source of joy to come across a genius who is inspired by the highest ideals of Indian culture, to whom self-expression is valuable only as a form of social service and God—ward adoration, who cares more for the doing of his duty and for contemplation than for the attainment of fame. Poetry is to him not an ornament of life but the soul of life. As has been well said by the *Statesman*, "A poet, who is a living embodiment of his own writings, is a rare phenomenon." It is his simplicity, purity, and spirituality that have endowed him with clarity of vision and melodious speech far beyond other men. This fact makes clear to us the reason why without any University education, he has been able to soar to the highest heavens of thought and poetical and musical expression. As has been said by Emerson in his *Oversoul*, "Only itself can inspire whom it will; and behold! their speech shall be lyrical, sweet, and universal as the rising of the wind." It has been admirably said of the poet:—

> Here is a saint who is not afraid to be a saint, who dares to mingle with the commonest things of the world, and a poet the very closeness of whose contact with earth lifts him ever nearer to heaven.

SOME ASPECTS OF HIS GENIUS.

The first aspect that deserves prominent notice is Tagore's singular power of interesting the soul of the East to the West. The *Daily Chronicle* wrote of him :—

> Others have been dazzled by the mystery, the brightness, the immensity of India ; we have drunk deep of its colour. But Mr. Tagore brings us its mind ; he has given us in rythmic prose the songs the people of Bengal sing ; he shows us their point of view, how they appreciate beauty, their joy in life, their patriotism. He has built a bridge between East and West.

The immense value of such work will become clearer to our minds when we realise how the great work of the coming centuries is to evolve a higher human type that will combine the mastery of the concrete which is the most prominent trait of modern Western civilisation with the idealism, the passion for the unknown, the attitude of ecstatic self-surrender and passiveness which have been the leading characteristics of the Indian civilisation.

The second aspect that we should remember is the fact that his work has brought about a *Renaissance* in the Bengali literature and will very soon bring about a *Renaissance* in other vernacular literatures in India. It is only through the vitalising of the vernaculars that a higher stage of national life can be reached in India, and Tagore has shown to us the great possibilities of the Indian languages as instruments of expression, as vehicles of exalted thought and emotion, as forces of nationalism.

Thus his peculiar greatness lies in the fact that he has recognised and proclaimed what a great destiny lies before the two great sister races inhabiting England and India, and how the two great countries are bound together by strong ties and must make every effort to evolve a higher type of life in the world. As has been well said :—

While he is inspired by nationalism, he has not hesitated to turn to his purpose what he regards the best in English methods of instruction, and to profit by the experience of the West.

We must not forget, however, that the most permanently valuable element in the genius of Rabindranath Tagore is the universal element in him, his appeal to the primary affections of the human heart and the truest and most intimate aspirations of the human soul, while at the same time his literary work is thoroughly national and is the finest flower of the modern Indian *Renaissance.* While we use the term *Renaissance*, we should remember that this *Renaissance* has nothing in common with the *Renaissance* in Europe except its love of beauty and passion for knowledge. The European *Renaissance* was a revival of pagan ideals and worship of external beauty, and laid more stress on enjoyment than on renunciation. The peculiar glory of the Indian *Renaissance* is, that it derives its inspiration and power not from a dead civilisation and a dead literature but from a real and living a vital civilisation and literature. The eternal life giving forces of the *Bhakthi* movement that have always been in right relation

to service and intuition in our holy land have been the most powerful of the unifying forces in our social and national life, and have kept our literature and art sweet and fresh through the hurrying ages and have preserved them from degeneration through poverty of aim or low standards of achievement. The Bengali *Renaissance* in Tagore's work is a purely Indian *Renaissance* with its insistence on inner purity, on renunciation, and on the need for dwelling in the heaven of the soul. These elements have also a universal aspect and a universal appeal. Hence it is that Tagore, while being the most representative national poet of India in the modern age, is a poet for all time and for all temperaments. He has been able to realise the beauty of all aspects of Nature and all sides of the spirit of man. As Mr. C. F. Andrews says in his article on "With Rabindra in England":—

"Just as the play of dazzling sunlight was a joy to him which he was never tired of watching; so the dazzling variety of the play of human life was to him an unending wonder and delight." . . . Rabindra appears to arrive at the universal, not like Shakespeare by any different roads, but always by the one pathway of simplicity. The simplest human affections, the child-heart of the young and innocent, the simplest domestic joys and sorrows, the purest and simplest yearnings of the soul for God,—these go to form the unity towards which Rabindra's poetic utterance is striving.

Another quality that has made Tagore a universal influence in India is, that he is a poet of the people. His heroes and heroines are drawn from the ordinary people, and their simple joys and

sorrows are rendered for us in musical language with extraordinary insight and depth of emotion. It is this trait, combined with his matchless power of capturing in words the heavenly intimations of a higher state of being, that seem to be waiting for us and beckoning us towards the heaven of God's love that have made his name a household word in India, and contain every promise of his being a great uplifting force for ever.

Another aspect that we should never forget is his burning patriotism. His love for India is more passionate worship than mere affection. I have already referred to some instances of his true and deep and passionate patriotism. The following poem from the *Gitanjali* shows what a lofty conception of patriotic ideals he has:—

> Where the mind is without fear and the head is
> held high;
> Where knowledge is free;
> Where the world has not been broken up into
> fragments by narrow domestic walls;
> Where words come out from the depth of truth;
> Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards
> perfection;
> Where the clear stream of reason has not lost
> its way into the dreary desert sand of dead
> habit;
> Where the mind is led forward by Thee into
> ever-widening thought and action—
> Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my
> country awake.
>
> (Pages 27-28 of the *Gitanjali.*)

TAGORE'S INSIGHT INTO INDIAN CULTURE AND IDEALS.

Even a casual reader of Tagore's works can realise how he is a true child of the soil, how he is

in profound sympathy with the loftiest racial aspirations, how he has an unerring insight into the true spirit of Indian culture and ideals. His articles on *My Interpretation of Indian History* show these characteristics very well. He says there, "India always seeks for the One amidst Many; her endeavour is to concentrate the diverse and scattered in One and not to diffuse herself over Many." The following passage shows a true recognition of the fact that the Aryan and Dravidian peoples have mingled, that we should now talk only of the Hindu race, and that both the Aryan and the non—Aryan elements have contributed elements of strength and beauty to the formation of the Hindu race. These are wise words to be remembered, pondered over, and treasured up in the heart at a time when wicked agitators are trying to effect a cleavage between the so-called Dravidians and the so-called Aryans, and distract our land with new forms of hatred and disunion. He says in the articles above referred to :—

Let none, however, imagine that the non-Aryans have contributed nothing of value to Indian life. The ancient Dravidians were, indeed, not deficient in civilisation. Contact with them made Hindu civilisation varied in aspect and deeper in spirit. The Dravidian was no theologian, but an expert in imagination, music and construction. He excelled in the fine arts. The pure spiritual knowledge of the Aryans, mingling with the Dravidians' emotional nature and power of æsthetic creation, formed a marvellous compound, which is neither entirely Aryan nor entirely non-Aryan, but *Hindu*. The eternal quest for the harmonising of these two opposite elements

has given to India a wondrous power. She has learnt to perceive the eternal amidst the temporal, to behold the great whole amidst all the petty things of daily life. And wherever in India these two opposite elements are not reconciled, there is no end to our ignorance and superstition. . . . . Wherever the opposite geniuses of the Aryan and the Dravidian have been harmonised, beauty has leapt into life; wherever such union has failed, the moral ugliness is repulsive.

Again, the poet shows how Indian ideals have considerable vitality and how age after age India has tried to achieve social solidarity and spiritual growth. His warning to India to cling to the higher things and to preserve her individuality and power of expansion should never be forgotten. He says: "The strength of a race is limited. If we nourish the ignoble, we are bound to starve the noble." The following magnificent conclusion of his abovesaid articles deserves to be written in letters of gold and engraved on every true Indian heart:—

Thus placed between two contending forces, we shall mark out the middle path of truth in our national life; we shall realise that only through the development of racial individuality can we truly attain to universality, and only in the light of the spirit of universality, can we perfect individuality; we shall know of a verity that it is idle mendicancy to discard our own and beg for the foreign, and at the same time we shall feel that it is the extreme abjectness of poverty to dwarf ourselves by rejecting the foreign.

In a remarkable address delivered in Japan, he has stated this great and central truth thus in regard to that wonderful land which has come to the forefront of modern civilisation by a strenuous

life of self-improvement and growth from within :—

The truth is, that Japan is old and new at the same time. She has her legacy of ancient culture from the East—the culture that enjoins men to look for his true wealth and power in his inner soul, the culture that gives self-possession in the face of loss and danger, self-sacrifice without counting the cost or hoping for gain, defiance of death, acceptance of countless social obligations that come to man as a social being —the culture that has given us the vision of the infinite in all finite things . . . . . And Japan, the child of the Ancient East, has also fearlessly claimed all the gifts of the modern age for herself. . . . . . . Thus she has come in contact with the living time and has accepted with an amazing eagerness and aptitude the responsibilities of modern civilisation. This it is which has given heart to the rest of Asia.

We shall now deal briefly with Tagore's interpretation of Kalidasa, as it shows what a real insight he has into the genius of that greatest of Indian poets and how fully he has entered into the spirit of the highest Indian culture. In his article on *Kalidasa, The Moralist*, he refutes the notion that Kalidasa was merely a poet of æsthetic enjoyment. Kalidasa has described not only the transfiguration of life by the light of a new-born love, but dwells lovingly on marital affection, on the sweetness and the joys and charities of home life, love that is faithful unto death and beyond death. Both in the *Sakuntala* and the *Kumara Sambhava* we have the ecstatic dawn of love, the unsatisfyingness of the mere physical side of love, and the ecstasy of the higher love which

is a union of souls that seek each other through renunciation and self-surrender. Tagore says:—

> He (Kalidasa) shows Cupid vanquished and burnt to ashes, and in Cupid's place he makes triumphant a power that has no decoration, no helper,—a power thin with austerities, darkened by sorrow.

TAGORE'S CONCEPTION OF THE FUNCTION OF ART.

Knowing thus, as we do, Tagore's essential ideas, we can well expect what his conception of art would be. While recognising that devotion to beauty, and love of creating beautiful things, are two of the highest manifestations of civilisation, he has realised that art is the handmaid of love and spirituality. It is the function and privilege of art to select and present the universal and eternally beautiful elements in Nature and in human life, and also reveal to us the infinite love and beauty, which is the soul of all things, which is ever fashioning matter into lovelier forms, and which is infinitely more than the finite modes of manifestation that have had being since the dawn of time. Tagore has recognised further that each art is capable of exercising its maximum of fascination over our hearts only when we show it exclusive devotion. He says in his article on *The Stage*, "Any one of the arts is only to be seen in her full glory when she is sole mistress." In regard to drama, he has pointed out that the modern love of scenic display and other stage accessories is not the proper way of enjoying the stage. He says in the article above said:—

> We all act to ourselves as we read a play, and the play which cannot be sufficiently interpreted by such

invisible acting has never yet gained the laurel for its author.

Tagore has expressed in beautiful words the high function of music and its real glory. He says in his article on *Music of East and West*:

Our music, as it were, moves above the incidents of daily life and, because of that it is so full of detachment and tenderness—as if it were appointed to reveal the beauty of the innermost and unutterable mystery of the human heart and of the world.

He says in it further :—

The art of music has its own nature and special function. Though there are words in a song, still they ought not to count for more than the song itself; they are only its vehicle. Song is glorious in its own right; why should it accept the slavery of words? Song begins where words end. The inexplicable is the domain of music. It can say what words cannot; so that the less the words of the song disturb the song, the better.

When we come to his conception of the mission and rapture of poesy, we are struck with wonder at the beauty of his ideas on this matter. He regards and extols poesy as the bride of love and values it as a means of spiritual union. (The following exquisite poem from *The Gitanjali*, page 6) shows his attitude very well. He says :—

My song has put off her adornments, she has no pride of dress and decoration. Ornaments would mar our union; they would come between thee and me; their jingling would drown thy whispers.

My poet's vanity dies in shame before thy sight. O master poet, I have sat down at thy feet, only let me make my life simple and straight, like a flute of reed for thee to fill with music.

What exquisite humility and insight are combined in the following poem in the *Gitanjali*! :—

I know Thou takest pleasure in my singing. I know that only as a singer I come before Thy presence.
I touch, by the edge of the far-spreading wing of my song, Thy feet which I could never aspire to reach.
Drunk with the joy of singing I forget myself and call Thee friend who art my Lord.

The sixteenth poem in the *Gitanjali* is equally beautiful and shows how the true aspiration of true poesy is divine communion. It is as follows :—

I have had my invitation to this world's festival, and thus my life has been blessed. My eyes have seen and my ears have heard.
It was my part at this feast to play upon my instrument, and I have done all I could.
Now, I ask, has the time come at last when I may go in and see Thy face and offer Thee my silent salutation?

The poet, while so full of humility, is at the same time conscious of the dignity of his work and the greatness of his mission in life. The seventy-fourth poem in *The Gardener* has a noble accent of pride and an ecstasy of dedicated life in it. It runs as follows :—

In the world's audience hall, the simple blade of grass sits on the same carpet with the sunbeam and the stars of midnight.
Thus my songs share their seats in the heart of the world with the music of the clouds and forests.
But, you men of riches, your wealth has no part in the simple grandeur of the sun's glad gold and the mellow gleam of the musing moon.
The blessing of the all-embracing sky is not shed upon it.

And when death appears, it pales and withers and crumbles into dust.

We shall give below one extract more to show how the poet realises that the unpremediated music that comes from him is simply the eternally sweet harmony of God's voice speaking through him. The sixty-fifth poem in the *Gitanjali* says:—

What divine drink woulds't thou have, my God from the overflowing cup of my life?

My Poet, is it Thy delight to see Thy creation through my eyes and to stand at the portals of my ears silently to listen to Thine own eternal harmony?

Thy world is weaving words in my mind and Thy joy is adding music to them. Thou givest Thyself to me in love and then feelest Thine own entire sweetness in me.

Further, like a true poet, he does not shut the gateways of the senses but allows the heavenly radiance of the spirit to come in a flood of glory through the senses. He says:—

Deliverance is not for me in renunciation. I feel the embrace of freedom in a thousand bond of delight . . . No, I will never shut the doors of my senses. The delights of sight and hearing and touch will bear Thy delight. Yes, all my illusions will burn into illumination of joy, and all my desires ripen into fruit of love.

(Page 68 of the *Gitanjali*.)

THE DEVELOPMENT OF TAGORE'S ART.

His work passed through three phases—the first, dealing with love and life, the second dealing with his country's future and her unique destiny, and the third with the highest spiritual longings

and aspirations. His early love poetry is of exquisite beauty and melody. His conception of India's place in the world, and of her lofty duties and destiny, is most beautiful and powerful. In later life his art grew deeper and became religious and philosophical. As has been well said, "All the aspirations of mankind are in his hymns.' His profoundest ideas are contained in the *Gitanjali*. Mr. W. B. Yeats, who has written an admirable Introduction to the *Gitanjali*, says of it :—

These verses will not lie in little well-printed books upon ladies' tables, who turn the pages with indolent hands that they may sigh over a life without meaning, which is yet all they can know of life, or be carried about by students at the University to be laid aside when the work of life begins, but as the generations pass, travellers will hum them on the highway and men rowing upon rivers. Lovers, while they await one another, shall find, in murmuring them, this love of God a magic gulf wherein their own more bitter passion may bathe and renew its youth. At every moment, the heart of this poet flows outward to these without derogation or condescension, for it has known that they will understand; and it has filled itself with the circumstance of their lives. . . . A whole people, a whole civilisation, immeasurably strange to us, seems to have been taken up into this imagination.

TAGORE'S STYLE.

His Bengali style is admitted by all to be unique, "full of subtlety of rhythm, of untranslatable delicacies of colour, of metrical invention"—in the words of Mr. W. B. Yeats. It is said that the variety of metrical effects that he has discovered and given to the world is wonderful.

It is impossible to convey such marvellous rhythmic grace by means of translations. We can, however, have a faint idea of the beauty of the style in the original poems from the poet's own translations. Of Tagore's books now available in English, only a few are translations by himself. These are, *Gitanjali*, *The Gardener*, *The Crescent Moon*, *Chitra*, *Translation of One Hundred Poems of Kabir* (which were translated by him and by Evelyn Underhill) and a number of short poems. The *Sadhana* consists of his great spiritual discourses delivered in English. Tagore's translations and addresses and writings in English are admirable in another respect also; they have all the charm and power of true classics in English literature. They show what exquisite English prose can be written by the higher Indian mind. The reviewer of Tagore's poem, in the *Quarterly Review* for July 1913, says:—

> It is, indeed, a memorable achievement for one whose native language is Bengali to attain, as the author has attained, an English style which combines at once the feminine grace of poetry with the virile power of prose.

He well calls the *Gitanjali* as "this flower of English prose." Mr. C. F. Andrews points out how modern English has lost its sweet harmonies and cadences and beauties owing to the invasion of literature by journalism. He says, "The English to-day that has filtered into literature from journalism, advertisements, and popularised slang, has debased the King's coinage." Love of epigrammatic and startling turns of

expression has begun to predominate over the simplicity, the beauty, and the harmony of the older styles of the great masters of English prose. Tagore's style is pure yet full of colour and passion, simple yet shining with beautiful ornament and flowing drapery of sound, and natural yet full of subtleties of cadence, rhythmical movement, and sweet silvery harmonies of sound that spread an atmosphere of enchantment and ecstasy.

TAGORE'S MYSTICISM.

No one can fully realise the significance and beauty of Rabindra Nath Tagore's poems, unless he knows and feels within himself the raptures of mystic thought and emotion. Modern worldliness, and our exclusive and absurd worship of scientific methods, have been fatal to the existence of mystic emotion in many modern hearts. There is a great deal of prejudice attaching to the word mysticism—a prejudice due as much to ignorance as to worldliness. Some people think that it is allied to black magic and the realm of darkness. Even those who pursue the scientific method, and are hence sworn adherents to truth and worship at her shrine, look with suspicion on the sudden and bright flashes of enlightenment that light up the heaven of the mystic's mind. They think that truth cannot be arrived at by any short cuts, and that all lovers of truth must take the long and winding road of scientific investigation alone. They think that there is something crude, nebulous, shadowy, and absurd in the mode of working of the mystic's mind. Dr. Max Nordau says, in

his powerful and admirable work on *Degeneration*, thus about mysticism :—

> The word described a state of mind in which the subject imagines that he perceives or divines unknown and inexplicable relations amongst phenomena, discerns in things, hints at mysteries, and regards them as symbols, by which a dark power seeks to unveil, or at least to indicate, all sorts of marvels which he endeavours to guess, though generally in vain.

He regards mysticism as a form of mental degeneration.

But in India mysticism of the higher type has always been recognised as a golden gateway leading to the innermost shrine of Truth. India is the only land where the deep and passionate spirituality of the race has enabled it to preserve the highest mystic thought and realise it.

The spiritual unity of things, and the existence of deep spiritual kinship and affinities between seemingly diverse and fragmentary things in the universe, are the great spiritual truths that India has taught to the world. Mysticism is the faculty that makes spiritual truths realisable in terms of thought and speech. Religion is due to a perpetual inner impulse to transcend the limitations of the senses, and mysticism is the power within us that tries to put into forms of thought and speech what is beyond speech and thought. There is no way of realising vividly in our minds the heavenly silences and the raptures, except by expressing them by material symbols and analogies. Mr. A. S. Mories says :—

> The peculiar feature of the mystics is, that in their most characteristic moments and states they seem to ignore and overleap merely intellectual barriers, and

fly straight to the apprehension of the truth which we find so laboriously wrought out by more cautious and sceptical minds. The mystics, wherever we find them, profess to have reached the joyous consciousness of a union with the divine spirit beyond any power of description which they themselves could command, or which others, however desirous to do so, could adequately understand.

What imagination is to the material and mental worlds, mysticism and spiritual vision is to the spiritual world. The peculiar trait of the imaginative faculty is its power of apprehending affinities between seemingly dissimilar objects, and of rousing us to a sense of the inter-relation and inter-dependence of things. When we speak of the moon as the white lotus of the sky, the imaginative faculty brings together two beautiful things which are far apart, and we see their inter-relation in a vivid flash of simile. Spiritual vision soars higher and shows us analogies and affinities between the material world and the spiritual heaven, and finally enables us to dwell in the paradise of Truth, Beauty, and Love. In the case of the mystic, material illustrations, analogies, parables, metaphors and similies are found to be necessary for the vivid realisation of really-felt facts of consciousness. Earthly unions become the symbols of spiritual unions. It is only in a mystic sense that God is our Father. A reviewer of the *Gitanjali* in the *Quarterly Review* wrote :—

Men take from the great poems of the world what meanings please them ; for the mystic the note of the lute is the eternal lure of God's voice leading us on to ever new adventures in experience without a thought of fear or regret for what we leave behind.

Spiritual things have no doubt to be spiritually discerned and realised, but before the final consummation of experience comes, they have to be made visible to the inner eyes, and mysticism is the only mode of making them visible to our inner eyes and the minds of others.

If Rabindranath Tagore is not recognised and loved as one of the mystic of poets and of the most poetic of mystics, we shall miss the real perfume of his genius. His poems contain the fragrance of the sweetest flowers of passionate mystic thought and emotion. It is very difficult to select illustrations of his mysticism when his poems have such a wonderful affluence of mystic thought and emotion. I shall give some examples below :—

You are the evening cloud floating in the sky of my dreams. . . . . Your feet are rosy-red with the glow of my heart's desire, Gleaner of my sunset songs. . . . . I have caught you and wrapt you, my love, in the net of my music. (Pages 58 and 59 of *The Gardener.*)

I know well the rhythm of your steps, they are beating in my heart. (Page 27 of *The Gardener.*)

Could I but entangle your feet with my heart and hold them fast to my breast. (Page 65 of *The Gardener.*)

He came when the night was still, . . he had his harp in his hands, and my dreams became resonant with its melodies. (Page 20 of the *Gitanjali.*)

Entering my heart unbidden even as one of the common crowd, my King, thou didst press the signet of eternity upon many a fleeting moment of my life. (Page 35 of the *Gitanjali.*)

What divine drink would'st Thou have, my God, from this overflowing cup of my life? (Page 61 of the *Gitanjali.*)

The light of Thy music illumines the world. The life breath of thy music runs from sky-to-sky. The

holy stream of Thy music breaks through all stony obstacles and rushes on. . . Ah, Thou hast made my heart captive in the endless meshes of Thy music, my Master! (Page 3 of the *Gitanjali.*)

It is thou who drawest the veil of night upon the tired eyes of the day to renew its sight in a fresher gladness of awakening. (Page 20 of the *Gitanjali.*)

Let your life lightly dance on the edges of time like dew on the tip of a leaf. (Page 81 of *The Gardener.*)

We have already shown how Tagore's mysticism is intimately allied to passionate patriotism and the verities of life. There are numerous poems of his, showing how the higher mysticism is allied to pure morality and lofty aims in life. He preaches attainment of joy through real renunciation, and the realisation of God's love through love and service of man. The following poem from the *Gitanjali* is very beautiful :—

Life of my life, I shall ever try to keep my body pure, knowing that Thy living touch is upon all my limbs.

I shall ever try to keep all untruths out from my thoughts, knowing that Thou art that truth which has kindled the light of reason in my mind.

I shall ever try to drive all evils away from my heart and keep my love in flower, knowing that Thou hast Thy seat in the inmost shrine of my heart.

And it shall be my endeavour to reveal Thee in my actions, knowing it is Thy power gives me strength to act. (Pages 3 and 4 of the *Gitanjali.*)

Again, Tagore's mysticism is not one that seeks to fly away from the true joys of home and the sweet charities of life. He preaches not the apparent renunciation seen in the forms of asceticism but the real renunciation of an unselfish and dedicated life. His mysticism seeks to let in the

radiance of the higher light, so that God's light may fall upon our earthly joys and activities and transfigure them into divine things. Pages 130-1 of *The Gardener* show this very well. The poet says in his forty-third poem in *The Gardener* :—

> No, my friends, I shall never leave my hearth and home, and retire into the forest solitude, if it rings no merry laughter in its echoing shade and if the end of no saffron mantle flutters in the wind, if its silence is not deepened by soft whispers, I shall never be an ascetic.

We have already shown when dealing with Tagore's interpretation of Kalidasa what a lofty conception of love Tagore has, and how the mystical note in his conception of love has given to it an added grace and a deeper sweetness.

CHARACTERISTICS OF TAGORE'S POETRY.

We have already dwelt on some characteristics of Tagore's poetry in the preceding portion of the sketch. An important trait that distinguishes him from all other modern poets is his unique faculty of realising and expressing the spiritual significance of things. We have lost this power, because of our worldliness and immersion in desire. It is only those who have attained the inner heights of renunciation that can have a clear view of the real relations of things. Seemingly ordinary things are interpreted by them in terms of the soul. As Mr. Yeats says in his admirable introduction to the *Gitanjali* :—

> The traveller in the red-brown clothes that he wears that dust may not show upon him, the girl searching in her bed for the petals fallen from the wreath of her royal lover, the servant of the bride awaiting the

master's home-coming in the empty house, are images of the heart turning to God. Flowers and rivers, the blowing of couch-shells, the heavy rain of the Indian July, or the parching heat, are images of the moods of that heart in union or in separation; and a man sitting in a boat upon a river playing upon a lute, like one of those figures full of mysterious meaning in a Chinese picture, is God Himself.

It is difficult to choose examples of this unique faculty from his poems, because of the multitude of such examples. We shall quote here a few of such examples. The forty-seventh poem in the *Gitanjali* runs as follows:—

The night is nearly spent waiting for Him in vain. I fear lest in the morning He suddenly come to my door when I have fallen asleep wearied out. Oh friends, leave the way open to him—forbid him not. Let him appear before my sight as the first of all lights and all forms. The first thrill of joy to my awakened soul let it come from His glance. And let my return to myself be immediate return to Him.

The sixty-fourth poem in the *Gitanjali* mingles the seen and the unseen and let us have a glimpse of the spiritual significance of the festival of lamps:—

On the slope of the desolate river among tall grasses, I asked her, "Maiden, where do you go shading your lamp with your mantle? My house is all dark and lonesome—lend me your light!" She raised her dark eyes for a moment and looked at my face through the dusk, "I have come to the river," she said, "to float my lamp on the stream when the day light wanes in the west." I stood alone among the tall grasses and watched the timid flame of her lamp uselessly drifting in the tide.

It is because of this great gift that everything is beautiful in his eyes, and that he is able to get

near to the heart of all things. Mr. Yeats says well :—

> An innocence, a simplicity that one does not find elsewhere in literature makes the birds and the leaves seem as near to him as they are near to children, and the changes of the season's great events, as before our thoughts, had arisen between them and us.

He has, in fact, the intellect of a sage, the imagination of a poet, the ecstasy of a lover, and the heart of a child. This is the reason why he has such a universal appeal, and why he is able to show us the great and beautiful secrets lying hidden behind the surface of things.

A great and peculiar distinction of Tagore is the fact that he has perfected the religious lyric. Those who are familiar with the entrancingly beautiful devotional lyrics in the divine Sanskrit tongue, and in the noble living languages in India, can well realise why it is that this true child of the great saints in this land has been able to write devotional poetry which is at once perfect poetry and truly devotional writing. His poems lead us into a world of inner ecstasy and spiritual emotion.

Tagore's Nature poetry has the peculiar characteristics that we can well expect from a consideration of his peculiar genius. To him Nature is the manifestation of God, and hence it is that in his eyes natural things have a beautiful spiritual significance. What might seem at first sight as the interpretation of Nature in terms of human emotion is really due to a singular spirituality of mind in which both Nature and man become divine. The following poem has a haunting

beauty and significance that fascinates our minds the oftener we read it :—

When I bring to you coloured toys, my child, I understand why there is such a play of colours on clouds, on water, and why flowers are painted in tints —when I give coloured toys to you, my child.

When I sing to make you dance, I truly know why there is music in leaves, and why waves send their chorus of voices to the heart of the listening earth— when I sing to make you dance.

When I bring sweet things to your greedy hands, I know why there is honey in the cup of the flower and why fruits are secretly filled with sweet juice—when I bring sweet things to your greedy hands.

When I kiss your face to make you smile my darling, I surely understand what the pleasure that streams from the sky in morning light, and what delight that is which the summer breeze brings to my body—when I kiss you to make you smile.

MY REMINISCENCES.

This volume is important as revealing to us the inner growth of Tagore's genius as described in his own vivid and forceful words. It shows the formative forces that moulded his thought and emotion and determined the self-expression of his unique powers.

"THE GITANJALI."

We have already referred to all the great and unique elements of beauty and power in this work. We wish merely to state briefly here the way in which the thoughts of the poet have developed in the work, so that all may turn to him for illumination and rapture. The first song in it shows a spirit of utter self-surrender of the soul to God. Poems 2, 3, 6, 15, 16, 17, and 65 deal with his conception of poesy and of its dignity

and sweetness. The sense of nearness to God cannot be more beautifully expressed than in the fifth poem. Poems 7 to 9 teach us the need of humility, simplicity, and love, if we yearn to get a glimpse of His face and desire for union with Him. Poems 10 and 11 teach us that we can reach Him only through love and service to His children. Poems 13, 14, 19, and other poems form a group, showing the poet's yearning for union with God, his sense of the fact that God is making him fitter and fitter for such bliss, and that the great consummation is sure to come. Poems 25, 86, 90, 91, 95, and 103 show us the real significance of death and the beauty of the face of the Angel of Death. Poem 28 teaches that God is our truest and best treasure. Poems 29 and 31, and other poems show us the misery of the worldliness that makes us dead to higher things. Poem 32 shows how God's love is always waiting for our love. Poems 34, 35, and 39 consist of two gems of prayers. Poem 58 shows the poet's desire for all beauty. Poems 69 and 73 teach us the unity of life and the great joy of irradiating the senses with the light of the spirit. Throughout the poems we see the outpouring of a spirit that has been able to combine morality with emotion, patriotism with love of humanity, the joys of home life with the detachment of asceticism, manliness and godliness, earth and heaven. Every poem in this wonderful book is full of the truest spirit of devotion, of love, and of self-surrender in an ecstasy of aspiration for the bliss of divine communion.

"THE GARDENER."

While the *Gitanjali* is thus profoundly religious in tone, the *Gardener* contains lofty devotional poetry, beautiful Nature lyrics, and exquisite love poetry, and has a wonderful wealth of colour and beauty. The note of simplicity, spontaneity and freshness, which is so characteristic of Tagore, is here heard in perfection. His unerring instinct for the choice of the right word is clearly discernible in these poems. The poetic beauty and appropriateness of the name "The Gardener" is seen from the following extract from the first poem :—

Queen:—What will you have for your reward?

Servant:—To be allowed to hold your little fists like slender lotus-buds and slip flower chains over your wrists; tinge the soles of your feet with the red juice of *ashoka* petals and kiss away the speck of dust that may chance to linger there.

Queen:—Your prayers are granted, my servant, you will be the gardener of my flower garden.

The second poem has an exquisite beauty and tells us that a poet should not merely hear the music of the hereafter and be dumb, but should serve humanity by voicing the sweetest human emotions and conveying the messages of Nature to man. Poems 1 to 12 are full of a profound symbolism and should be studied often to realise their full inner significance. The following extract puts in a faultless form one of the highest longings of a pure heart :—

I am restless. I am athirst for far-away things.
My soul goes out in a longing to touch the skirt
of the dim distance
O Great Beyond, O the keen call of thy flute!
I forget, I ever forget, that I have no wings to fly,
that I am bound in this spot evermore.

I have already referred to some of the exquisite love poems in this book. Poems 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22, 23, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 32, 33, 34, 36, 38, 39, 40, 41, 48, 56, 59, 62 and 80 are some of these lyrical gems. The real nature of love that longs to spend itself in an ecstasy of adoring self-surrender cannot be better expressed than in the following passage in the twenty-seventh poem :—

> The lotus blooms in the sight of the sun and loses all that it has. I would not remain in bud in the eternal winter mist.

It will be impossible here to refer in detail to the other beautiful poems, but we hope that enough has been said here to kindle a deep love for Tagore, and an eager desire to read him and hear his message.

"THE CRESCENT MOON."

That Tagore is not a man who has lost the child-like in the larger mind and has realised the mystery, the sweetness, and the divinity of childhood, is clear from these poems. In this book the crescent moon is the child. What an exquisite appellation! The poet discovers for us the abodes of joy in the humblest homes and shows us what thrills of delight we can have if we only see things aright. His idealisation of childhood is true and beautiful. The poems entitled, "The Beginning," "Defamation," and "The Judge," show us how even the little faults of children are more charming than any virtue. The heaven of child-life is brought before us in these poems. The poem, "When and Why," has a deep

spiritual meaning and shows us how we are all children of the Divine Mother of all.

"CHITRA."

This beautiful play brings before our vision the exquisiteness and true meaning of the Indian conception of love, and of the joys and graces and sanctities of wedded life. Tagore's view may be best stated in the noble words in which he describes the view of Kalidasa, the greatest of India's poets and the supreme artistic embodiment of our national genius in the most vital and powerful era of our national life. "The poet has shown here, as in *Kumarasambhava*, that the beauty that goes hand in hand with Moral Law is eternal, that the calm, controlled, and beneficent form of love is its best form, that Beauty is truly charming under restraint and decays quickly when it gets wild and unfettered." The story of the play is taken from the Mahabharata, but Tagore's genius has invested it with a wonderful loveliness and a new significance. Chitra has a golden beauty of soul, but is plain in face and form and figure. She loves Arjuna, but he does not respond to her love. She then gets from Cupid and Vasanta the grant of one year's radiance of physical loveliness, and Arjuna is captivated by her heavenly beauty. Slowly he comes under the spell of her soul, and his love grows into something higher and endures for ever when her temporary robe of physical splendour disappears and discloses "the goddess hidden in a golden image."

THE KING OF THE DARK CHAMBER.

In this play there is a wonderful affluence of mystical emotion and spiritual realisation. It is a divine allegory showing the final attainment of true love and endless bliss by the human soul as the bride of the eternal bridegroom. The mind and the senses that seek to subdue and possess the human soul are finally made to realise their true place in the economy of things; the illusions of life fly away before the dawn of the sun of divine love; and led by spiritual wisdom the human soul enters the palace of God's love and attains "the peace that passeth all understanding."

THE POST OFFICE.

In this beautiful drama, Tagore gently lifts the veil that hides from our eyes the mysteries of life and death. Madhao, a rich and worldly and sonless man, brings up a boy named Amal. Amal symbolises the pure and evolved and hence childlike soul. The true crown of human life is the attainment of the wisdom of the sage while keeping the heart of the child. Amal sees the procession of human life pass before his eyes and yearns for the coming of God, the King. God's Grace comes in the end, and Amal goes into deep sleep with the yearning that God should make him His postman, taking His message to every home and bearing the blessed tidings of God's Infinite Mercy and Love to every human heart.

PHALGUNI.

This beautiful play makes us realise vividly the great truth taught in the Indian sacred books, that the soul is immortal and that,

There is no Death! What seems so is transition.

The play consists of four scenes called Outburst, Search, Doubt and Discovery, respectively. It concludes thus :—

> Spirit is awake!
> Life's shoreless sea is heaving in the sun before you,
> All the losses are lost and death is drowned in its waves,
> Plunge into the deep without fear with the gladness of April in your blood.

"TRANSLATION OF ONE HUNDRED POEMS OF KABIR."

The introduction to this work, by Evelyn Underhill, is admirable for its insight and interpretative power and for its felicity of expression. What she says of Kabir in it is quite applicable to Tagore also. She says that Kabir's songs are "the spontaneous expressions of his Vision and his Love." She says further, "He knew now to combine vision and industry; the work of his hands helped rather than hindered the impassioned meditation of his heart. . . . . It was from out of the heart of the common life that he sang his rapturous lyrics of divine love." I shall quote here two extracts to show what divine correspondences of emotion and expression exist between Kabir and Tagore :—

> The melody of love swells forth and the rhythm of love's detachment beats the time. Day and night the chorus of Music fills the heavens.
>
> (*Translation of Kabir*, page 17.)
>
> The light of thy music illumines the world. The life-breath of thy music runs from sky to sky. The holier stream of thy music breaks through all stony obstacles and rushes on.
>
> (*Gitanjali*, page 3.)

TAGORE'S STORIES.

Glimpses of Bengal Life and *Hungry Stones* are collections of Tagore's stories. Many other stories by him have been translated and published in various magazines. Tagore excels in the short story and is a past master in the art of rendering imaginatively the thoughts and feelings of the Indian people as revealed in their daily life. Being essentially a poet, his nature is attracted by the poetic elements in life and Nature. His lyric approach gives his stories their distinctive traits and reveals his true strength and his limitations. He simplifies the incidents of the story and delineates only simple natures, and is hence averse to writing long novels dealing with numerous or complex characters. He brings out "the true pathos and sublime of human life" in a new and admirable manner. Thus, his short stories are things of beauty and are full of truth to life, while his longer stories are not among his best literary achievements. Everywhere in them we see Tagore's golden beauty of style and his vivid sense of beauty. The following is a fine example:—

When the hermit would at early dawn every day immerse in the water of the Ganges before sunrise, facing the morning star, and say his morning prayers in a calm solemn voice, I could then hardly hear the noise of the flowing stream. While listening to his voice, the sky towards the eastern bank would every day assume a ruddy hue, streaks of crimson would dye the fringes of the clouds, darkness would break and drop down on every side, like of the covering of the flowerbud about to bloom, and the red tint of the blooming dawn would gradually come out in the celestial expanse.—(*Glimpses of Bengal Life*, page 138.)

SADHÂNA.

Tagore's *Sadhana* consists of discourses delivered in America and again in England. They contain the quintessence of his ideas on life and its meaning and its goal. In the first discourse he lays stress on India's realisation of the unity and divinity of life, and says that this great idea of India owes its birth to the fact that her civilisation was nurtured in the great forests and not within city walls. In the second discourse, he explains the meaning of *soul consciousness* and of the injunction, Know thine own soul. The third discourse deals with the problem of evil, and the fourth discourse deals with the problem of self. "Good is that which is desirable for our greater self," and man's highest *dharma* is self-sacrifice. The last four discourses deal with various aspects of realisation—realisation in love, realisation in action, realisation of beauty, and realisation of the infinite. He says towards the end of this great book of meditations, "Man's abiding happiness is not in getting anything but in giving himself up to what is greater than himself, to ideas which are larger than his individual life, the idea of his country, of humanity, of God."

PERSONALITY.

In this great volume of addresses Tagore shows us the true meaning of art and human personality. Civilisation is built on man's surplus of intelligence and love. Art is the revelation of personality, man's second and true birth is in love. This volume describes also Tagore's school and his vital ideas on woman's place in life. It is full of "the

message of self-dedication in the perfect beauty of worships."

NATIONALISM.

This is a powerful volume condemning false nationalism and pleading for true nationalism. The modern nations are huge machineries for exploitation. Tagore then gives us the following valuable advice. "Let our life be simple in its outer aspect and rich in its inner gain. Let our civilisation take its firm stand upon its basis of social co-operation and not upon that of economic exploitation and conflict."

FRUIT-GATHERING.

This volume of poems is a noble sequel to *Gitanjali* and is full of the reposefulness and Godward yearning of a fulfilled life. It has all the wonderful and unparalleled charm of style and sentiment that *Gitanjali* has got, and by some divine dower of the secret of the golden touch it transmutes the lead of life into the gold of God. The keynote of the book is sounded in the second poem :—

> My life, when young, was like a flower—a flower that loosens a petal or two from her abundance and never feels the loss when the spring breeze comes to beg at the door.
>
> Now at the end of youth my life is like a fruit, having nothing to spare, and waiting to offer herself completely with her full burden of sweetness.

The poet shows us the Lord's love for those who yield themselves up to Him in a spirit of glad self-surrender : "You are the wise and the great who sit by my Master, but he has taken the foolish in his arms and made me his servant for

ever." The readers of the divine *Tiruvachakam* of Southern India will realise how akin this utterance is to that of him "whose words are gems." The poet seeks to realise the infinite beauty and sweetness of God in innumerable ways. He calls aloud to his heart: "The desire of the bud is for the night and dew, but the blown flower cries for the freedom of light: Burst your sheath, my heart, and come forth!" He prays to God to give him the garland of love instead of the jewelled chain of worldly success. He realises how God's message to the soul is as simple as it is sweet. He says, "Your speech is simple, my master! but not theirs who talk of you." God's Grace comes like the blessed and gentle rain from heaven and cannot be commanded or forced. "Shake the bud, strike it; it is beyond your power to make it blossom. . . . . . He gives it a glance and the life-sap stirs through its veins. At his breath, the flower spreads its wings and flutters in the word," One peculiar and glorious feature of this book is its use of the sweetest stories and parables in the lives of our saints for the service of beauty and love, and for the revelation of the diviner elements in life. Noble incidents in the lives of Sanatan, Supriya, Narottam, Upagupta, Shrimathi, and Tulsidas are made to yield their full treasure of divine love and wisdom. It is a pity, however, that Tagore has missed the full beauty and sweetness of the story of Satyakama Jabala as expounded by Sri Sankaracharya. The poems about the dewdrop and the lamp have an infinity of emotional

suggestiveness in them. The mother aspect of Godhead is described in these wonderful lines: "She who is ever returning to God his own outflowing of sweetness; she is the ever fresh beauty and youth in Nature." The poems are, in short, full of keen and radiant vision and fulfilled faith, which find triumphant and rapturous utterance in the lines: "I will meet one day the joy without me that dwells behind the screen of light."

STRAY BIRDS.

This small but precious volume of stray poems has got an inner inter-connectedness of mood and feeling. The first poem gives the clue to the name of the book: "Stray birds of summer come to my window to sing and fly away." This volume gives us the quintessence of life and art in little poems great in meaning and greater in suggestion. I shall quote here but two poems to show this. This "world is the world of wild storms kept tame with the music of beauty."

"The song feels the infinite in the air, the picture in the earth of the poem in the air and the earth."

LOVER'S GIFT AND CROSSING.

This little volume of poems contains Tagore's mature ideas about life and love and death.

The poems entitled *Lover's Gift* describe the lover's urge to love and service. The poems entitled *Crossing* deal with the mysteries of death. The following is one of the beautiful poems of prayer in this volume.

"Let thy love play upon my voice and restore my silence.

Let it pass through my heart into all my movements.

Let thy love like stars shine in the darknese of my sleep and dawn in my awakening.

HUNGRY STONES AND OTHER STORIES.

This consists of thirteen short stories by Tagore. Some of them have been translated already in *Glimpses of Bengal Life*. One of the stories, *The Victory*, has been translated by Tagore himself, and seven stories have been translated by Mr. C. F. Andrews. The translations not only bring out the wonderful felicities of style and sentiment in the original but have the accent of the classics of English prose. Tagore's unique supremacy in the domain of the short story is well known, and these stories are full of beauty and power in a remarkable degree. The first story entitled, *Hungry Stones* shows, as Mr. Ernest Rhys well says, "a truly uncanny power in romance." It opens up before our vision a crowded past, full of shadowy figures which are wandering in the land of dreams and which have lived passionate lives while in the land of the living. The second story called *The Victory* takes us to the realm of pure romance where a court poet, supreme in his dower of sweetness of emotion and expression, is crowned with the love and praise of the beautiful princess, though he is slighted by the king and seeks release from his sorrow in death. A passage in it describes aptly the beauty and

wide popularity of Tagore's own poems and songs. "The poet's songs were on the lips of all. At the merest glimmer of the moon and the faintest whisper of the breeze, his songs would break forth in the land from windows and out-yards, from sailing boats, from shadows of the wayside trees, in numberless voices." The next three stories deal with Indian childhood of the old and the new types. The next story called *The Kingdom of Cards* satirises in an original and inimitable way the dull and dead routine of Indian social life. It shows how three strangers got stranded on the shores of the Kingdom of Cards and upset everything and stirred everything into a new life by their *icha* (initiative and and self-willed life). We must not look for any social gospel in a short story, and if any social gospel is intended by it, we must say that it errs by overstatement and exaggeration. *The Devotee and Vision* unbares to us the hearts of two noble women purified by suffering and uplifted by a lofty feeling. The *Babus of Nayanjore* is conceived in a lighter vein, and describes the scion of an once prosperous Indian nobleman's family and his simple, confiding nature in a humorous way. The story *We Crown Thee King* is worthy of special mention. It shows how the influence of the women of India steadies the menfolk, and how in many cases it keeps the flame of patriotism alive in their hearts. In *The Renunciation*, Tagore ridicules some of the Hindu social customs. The *Cabuliwalah* describes how the same human heart beats in every breast. All the stories

show wonderful insight into human nature and a never-failing natural magic of style

Nashi AND OTHER STORIES.

This volume also contains a large number of beautiful short stories. I may quote here two fine passages in it. The greatest changes in a woman's nature are wrought by love in man's by ambitions. " Reality represses the flow of feeling like a rock ; imagination cuts out a path for itself."

Sacrifice AND OTHER PLAYS.

These four plays have less lyric charm but have greater force and vividness than some of his earlier dramas. Tagore pleads in them for greater social freedom and sympathy.

TAGORE'S MISCELLANEOUS WRITINGS.

Tagore's miscellaneous writings are innumerable and invaluable They cover a vast field—poetry, music, drama, fiction, creative criticism, essays on history politics, and sociology, sermons, letters, reminiscences, addresses on great political and other occasions, etc. His impressions of Japan, England, America, and other countries are admirable for their insight and wisdom. It is impossible to deal with them adequately in this brief sketch, but we shall quote here the following precious sentence conveying Tagore's supreme message to the world : " As the mission of the rose lies in the unfoldment of the petals which implies distinctness, so the rose of humanity is perfectivity when the diverse races and the nations have evolved their perfected distinct characteristics, but all attached to the stem of humanity by the bond of love."

TAGORE'S RELIGIOUS IDEAS.

The chief fact of life is after all religion, and the supreme concerns of life are, the how, the why, and the wherefore of things. In regard to them, Tagore speaks with golden eloquence and assured conviction and gives us a glimpse into the beatitudes of the truly religious soul. Mr. Yeats has well expressed the very essence of Tagore's religious teaching when he says, "Mr. Tagore, like the Indian civilisation itself, has been content to discover the soul and surrender himself to its spontaneity." Tagore says:—

Our soul, when detached and imprisoned within the narrow limits of a self, loses its significance. For its very essence is unity. It can only find out its truth by uniting itself with others, and only then it has its joy.

Again, he says:—

For a man who has realised his soul, there is a determinate centre of the universe, around which all else can find its proper place, and thence only can he enjoy the blessedness of a harmonious life.

It will be impossible to dwell in detail here on all the great religious ideas of the poet. The main and passionate idea running through all the poems is, that the highest aim of existence is the love of God and union with God. The means which Tagore teaches for arriving at this consummation are the living of a simple and self-poised life of service, renunciation, and love. Nowhere else can we find the idea of the surrender of our being to God's love so well expressed as in the first poem in the *Gitanjali*. Tagore says there:—

Thou hast made me endless, such is Thy pleasure. This frail vessel Thou emptiest again and again, and fillest it ever with fresh life.

This little flute of a reed Thou hast carried over hills and dales, and hast breathed through it melodies eternally new.

At the immortal touch of Thy hands, my little heart loses its limits in joy and gives birth to utterance ineffable.

Tagore's yearning for union with God is well seen in the following sentence from the *Gitanjali* :—

Let all my songs gather together their diverse strains into a single current and flow to a sea of silence in one salutation to Thee.

His views on Death have great beauty and truth in them :—

It is Thou who drawest the veil of night upon the tired eyes of the day to renew its sight in a fresher gladness of awakening.

The Gardener :—

There must come a full pause to weave perfection into music. Life droops towards its sunset to be drowned in the golden shadows.

Tagore teaches the spiritual unity of life which is India's greatest contribution to the world's stock of immortal ideas. He says :—

The same stream of life that runs through my veins night and day runs through the world and dances in rhythmic measures.

We shall conclude this portion, however reluctantly, with the following gem of a prayer :—

This is my prayer to Thee, my Lord,—strike, strike at the root of penury in my heart. Give me the strength lightly to bear my joys and sorrows. Give me the strength to make my love fruitful in service. Give me the strength never to disown the poor or bend my knees before insolent might. Give me

strength to raise my mind high above daily trifles. And give me the strength to surrender my strength to Thy will with love.

(Pages 28 and 29 of the *Gitanjali.*)

TAGORE'S POLITICS.

Rabindranath Tagore is fully occupied with his literary pursuits and all his spare hours are devoted to the school at Bholpur which invariably claims his first affection. But he has not been altogether indifferent to politics. We are told that in his youth he took to politics with uncertain success. Though he has wisely refrained from participating in the controversial discussions of the day it is not to be supposed that he is either complacent or apathetic. When the occasion demanded he emerged from his poetic seclusion and plunged into the fray with all the ardour of his passionate energy. When the whole country was burning with indignation at the internment of Mrs. Besant his voice of protest against the Government's unchivalrous action rang clear. He threw himself heartily into the campaign against the bureaucratic challenge and might almost he said to have led for a time the great agitation in Bengal. When the atmosphere was almost white hot, he delivered an impassioned address at Calcutta in August 1917. He spoke in Bengalee and his lecture was quaintly entitled, "Things being shaped as the Master desires"—the reference being obviously to the autocracy of the rulers. The auditorium in the Alfred Theatre was crowded to suffocation, several hundreds waiting outside the gates.

Mr. Bhupendranath Basu, now of the India Council, presided, and there was a distinguished gathering of Bengalee celebrities from far and near. In the course of his impassioned speech Tagore said:

"I have grown grey as I have watched year after year, how, at the least shower of rain, Chitpore Road, in front of our lane, becomes flooded and how the discomfort of its being under water is emphasised for us and the wheels of our luckless carriages by the underlying tram tracks which, on this road, are in a chronic state of being under repairs.

I have latterly begun to think that it is possible not to allow this kind of thing to go on—that, in fact, one gets on ever so much better for not allowing it to go on—and that the contrast between Chitpore Road and Chowringhee is driven home to every one who goes about with his eyes open. They both belong to and are part and parcel of the same city, the same municipality, but what we are willing to suffer in the Northern part, they are not willing to stand in the South. We await our Master's voice if they insist on being their own masters.

The right of being one's own master is the greatest of man's rights. So this country,—in which all teachings and injunction, all rules and observances, have been directed towards keeping this greatest of rights suppressed, where paths are destroyed lost footsteps should stray, where in the name of religion man is humiliated and abased,—has naturally become the greatest of slave-factories.

Our modern bureaucratic rulers have taken to gravely offering us the same counsel; "You are unfit, you will make mistakes, Self-Government, is not for you." These teachings of Mana and Parashar sound strangely out of tune whom repeated in English and rouse us to give the reply which the spirit of European civilisation itself has taught us:—"To make mistakes

is not so serious a matter at not to be one's own master. Truth can only be arrived at, if one is free to err."

We may go further and remind our bureaucratic masters that the automobile of Self-Government, which they now so prowdly drive in their own country, was not always there; and that the creating of the old Parliamentary cart, which first began its journey in the night jolting its way from the rut of one precedent to another, did not sound exactly like the music of a triumphal progress. How it used to sway from interrest to interest,—of the King, of the Church, of the landlord, of the brewer! Was there not a time when its members could only be made to attend under threat of penalty? And, talking of blunders, what a tale could be unfolded of its old relations with Ireland and America and its blazing indiscretions in the Dardanelles and Mesopotamia, to say nothing of the not inconsiderable list which might be made out for India alone.

And we have finally a still more important point to urge. Self-Government not only leads to efficiency and a greater sense of responsibility, but it makes for the uplifting of the national spirit, when those whose minds are now confined within the parochial limits of community village or given the opportunity of thinking and acting imperially, then alone can they realise the vision of mankind in its larger sense.

Therefore, in spite of all risks of muddles or blunders, we must have Self-Government—this and this alone is the sovereign cure of all our national distempers.

The poet then voiced the aspirations of awakening India. "To-day" he said, "all the world is praying to be relieved from subservience to the dictates of masters and supermen." "Awakened by the modern spirit," he continued "we are

yearning to join in the universal chorus of Democracy. It would have been our eternal shame had we failed to do so, had we proved our undying yearning for some master's voice. It is of happy augury that we have caught a glimpse of the truth and are still able to respond to it!"

The poet then turned to the burning questions of the day, the high-handedness of the Provincial Governments in suppressing freedom of opinion, and said :—

That the people are most concerned in their own Government is a truth greater than the Government itself. This is the truth which gives strength to the British people. This is the truth which is also our strength. If we fail to hold on to this truth, the Government will lose sight of it likewise. If we do not believe and trust in the British ideal of Self-Government, then the police must needs tyrannise over us and the efforts of the Magistrate to protect us will be unavailing; then will the God of prestige continue to demand its human victims and British rule in India give the lie to historic British ideals.

After a hundred and fifty years of British rule we hear to-day that Bengal is not even to be allowed to sigh over the troubles of her sister Province of Madras: Up to now we had been led to believe that the fact that under the same British sovereignty the Provinces of Bengal, Punjab, Madras and Bombay were all being welded into a uniformity of ideal and aspiration was one of the brightest jewels of the British crown. We are told in the West that Britain entered this war and faced that accounting the sorrows of Belgium and France as her own; and are we to be told in the same breath in the East that Bengal must not bother her head about the troubles of Madras? Is this a command to which we are prepared to bow the head? Do we not know for certain, in spite of the vehemence of its utterance, of the load of shame which lurks behind?

England came to India, as representing European civilisation. The ideal of that civilisation is the word she has pledged to us. We must hold her to that word. It is our duty not to allow her to forget it. Unless both parties do their duty forgetfulness and fall will be the inevitable consequence. Science comradeship and self-respect of the people, this is the wealth which Europe has acquired. This is the consideration on which must be based England's title to the Empire.

The Englishman may point to his own history and say "This great ideal of the Government of the people by the people was evolved by us through many a struggle and at the cost of much striving and sacrifice", I admit it. All pioneer peoples of the world, in the pursuit of their several quests, have had to pass through much error and sorrow and strife. But when they have gained the truth they sought, it has become available to others without their having to tread the same long road of error and sacrifice.

He concluded with these pregnant words:—

I do not deny that we have our weakness in our individual characters and in our social system. Still we want Self-Government. In the great domocratic festival of the world no one people have all their lights burning—yet the festival goes on. If for some time our light has gone out, may we not ask for it to be lit at the wick of England's lamp without thereby raising a howl of indignation? It will not detract from England's lights but surely add to the brightness of the world's illumination.

We have quoted at length from this speech as it is typical of all his public addresses, in style, in sentiment, and in the fervour of his appeal.

That year Mrs. Besant was elected to preside over the Calcutta Congress while she was yet under internment, and Sir Tagore was pressed to be the Chairman of the Reception Committee.

Sir Rabindranath after some controversy in the press finally declined to serve in that capacity and he content himself with reading a remarkable poem composed specially for the occasion.

In the summer of 1919, Tagore made an extensive tour of the country delivering lectures at all places he visited. This was a welcome opportunity for many in South India, to come in contact with the great poet of whom they had only read in the books and newspapers. It was a joy to see him in person, the beautiful figure of the Bengalee poet with his picturesque attire as of an oriental pilgrim. For the first time they also heard his address with a voice, so sweet, so musical that took them captive. Sir Tagore discoursed on many subjects. It was a rare treat to hear him appraise the poetry of Kalidasa in comparison with the lyrical genius of Milton and Shakespeare. But education is his speciality and he frequently lectured on this favourite topic.

On each race is the duty laid to keep alight its own lamp of mind, as its part in the illumination of the world. To break the lamp of any people is to deprive it of its rightful place in the world festival. He who has no light is unfortunate enough, but utterly miserable is he who having it has been deprived of it or has forgotten its existence. India has proved that it has its own mind which has deeply thought and felt, and tried to solve according to its light the problems of existence. The education of India, is to enable this mind of India to find out truth, to make this truth its own whereever found and to give expression to it in such a manner as only it can do. In order to carry this out the mind of India, has to be concentrated and made conscious of itself and then only can it accept

education from its teachers in a right spirit, judge it by its own standard, and make use of it by its own creative power. The fingers must be joined together to take as well as to give So when we can bring the scattered minds of India, into co-ordinated activity, they will then become receptive as well as creative, and the waters of life will cease to slip through the gap. to make sodden the ground beneath.

The next point in education, the most important factor, must be the inspiring atmosphere of creative activity And therefore the primary function of our University should be the constructive work of knowledge. Men should be brought together and full scope given to them for their work of intellectual exploration and creation; and the teaching should be like the overflow water of this spring of culture, spontaneous and inevitable. Education can only become natural and wholesome when it is the direct fruit of a living and growing knowledge.

The last point is that our education should be in full association with our complete life, economical, intellectual, æsthetic, social and spiritual; and our educational institutions should be in the very heart of our society, connected with it by the living bonds of varied co-operation. For true education is to realize at every step how our training and information have organic connection with our surroundings.

On the conclusion of this tour Tagore resumed his poetry and Educational schemes. But the Punjab tragedy broke his silence and once again he emerged with an inspiring message to his countrymen. It is needless to dwell at length on the massacre of Jullianwallah and all the terrorism of the Martial Law administration in the Punjab. Tagore returned his insignia to the authorities as a protest against the Punjab tragedy. His message to a Bombay gathering conveyed through Mr. C. F. Andrews in April

1920 gives an idea of the intensity of his emotion roused by the atrocities in a neighbouring province. Tagore wrote :—

A great crime has been done in the name of law in the Punjab. Such terrible eruptions of evil leave their legacy of wreckage of ideals behind them. What happened in Jallianwalah Bagh was itself a monstrous progeny of a monstrous war which for four years had been defiling God's world with fire and poison, physical and moral.

The immenseness of the sin through which humanity has waded across its blood-red length of agony has spread callousness in the minds of those who have power in their hands with no check of sympathy within, of fear of resistance without. The cowardliness of the powerful who own no share in using their machines of frightfulness upon the unarmed and unwarned villagers, and inflicting unspeakable humiliation upon their fellow-beings behind the screen of an indecent mockery of justice, and yet not feeling for a moment that it was the meanest form of insult to their own manhood, has become only possible through the opportunity which the late war had given to man for constantly outraging his own higher nature, trampling truth and honour under foot.

This disruption of the basis of civilisation will continue to produce a series of moral earth-quakes and men will have to be ready for still further sufferings That the balance will take a long time to be rested is clearly seen by the suicidal ferocity of vengefulness ominously tinging red the atmosphere of the peace deliberations.

But we have no place in these orgies of triumphant powers rending the world into lists according to their own purposes. What most concerns us is to know that the moral degradation not only pursues the people inflicting indignities upon the helpless, but also their victims. The dastardliness of cruel injustice, confident of its impunity, is ugly and mean ; but the fear and impotent, anger which they are apt to breed upon the minds of the weak are no less abject.

Brothers, when physical force, in its arrogant faith in itself, tries to crush the spirit of man, then comes the time for him to assert that his soul is indomitable. We shall refuse to be afraid and to own moral defeat, but shall not be cherishing in our hearts foul dreams of retaliation. The time has come for the victims to be the victors in the field of righteousness. When brother spills the blood of his brother and exults in his own sin, giving it a high sounding name, when he tries to keep the blood-stains fresh on the soil as a memorial of his anger, then God in shame conceals it under his green grass and the sweet purity of his flower. We who have witnessed the wholesale slaughter of the innocent in our own neighbourhood, let us accept God's own office and cover the bloodstains of injury with our prayer. "With thy graciousness O' Terrible, for ever save us": For the true Grace comes from The Terrible who can save our souls from fear of suffering and death in the very midst of terror, and from vindictiveness in defiance of injury.

Let us take our lesson from His hand even when the smart of the pain and insult is still fresh—the lesson that all meanness, cruelty and untruth are for the obscurity of oblivion and only the noble and true are for eternity. Let those, who wish try to burden the minds of the future with stones carrying the black memory of wrongs and their anger; but let us bequeath to the generations to come memorial of that only which we can reverse. Let us be grateful to our forefathers who have left us the image of our Buddha who conquered self, preached forgiveness, and spread his love wide in time and space.

Soon after he left for England and was in London during the Dyer debate. On the afternoon following the close of the debate in the House of Lords a newspaper correspondent interviewed him and cabled his views in the following words:

I asked Dr. Rabindranath Tagore, what he thought of the situation. Speaking with the deepest emotion

he said he thanked our friends who braved the wrath of their countrymen and courted failure by chivalrously championing the cause of our unfortunate country. But he felt grieved and insulted at the unashamed condonation of a brutal outrage by the very class from which our rulers are recruited. This makes us, he said, realise the futility and humiliation of relying for any boon of any value from those who hold us in contempt. Only by removing the inner sources of weakness, organising our social, educational and economic life can we rise out of our present depth of degradation. Be prepared for many sacrifices, to undergo suffering for the common cause. Sink differences of all kinds. Promote the spirit of concord and co-operation. The present shock of disillusionment if accepted in the right spirit will prove a blessing in disguise and form the basis of a new era of a career of national self-respect, spiritual emancipation and material progress. Only by freeing ourselves from the spirit of dependance and mendicancy, casting out fear and guarding ourselves against the wasteful destruction of impotent anger and vengeful resentment can we rise to the true measure of greatness.

In fact the Punjab tragedy has burnt itself in his soul and again and again he reverted to it with much feeling Interviewed by the Editor of *Britain and India* Dr. Tagore, said :—

"India is feeling bitter," "owing to the outrages that have taken place. She is waiting for the people in this country to disown to condemn them. It will help us to forget if we find that the British condemn them strongly and do not condemn them at all. I do not think that condemnation has come yet, and, even, there seems some chance that the right condemnation will fail, as the Houses of Parliament do not seem anxious to take up the matter.

"But if it happens, that Parliament passes the matter by and Dyer is not condemned, and that condemnation not adequately expressed, then I think the

situation in India, will become critical. Our people will keep in it memory, and it will rankle and end in unpleasantness. Amritsar, has really caused great resentment, and the Reform Bill has not done much to allay it. Our people must know that Britain, has no sympathy with such acts, but they are beginning to suspect that the expression of their lack of sympathy may not come. In the Houses of Parliament the military party seem to have their own way. If that happens it will be very unfortunate. If Indians feel that anything can be done with impunity in India then bitterness will be extremely strong.

Asked of his views on the Montagu reforms he said :—

"I do not take much interest in it really because it seems to me unreal," he said, "I want to give my time to constructive work on our own lines. The Bill does not give real freedom, but only the semblance of it, so I do not take any real interest in it. I am much more interested in what we can do by self-sacrifice and social service, and the endeavour to work out our own salvation. These political campaigns create such personal bitterness and vituperation. They may have their own use, and may serve some useful end, I do not know. I hate politics, and I don't like to talk about it. I may be unjust, but to me there are other things far more worthy of attention."

Dr. Tagore, is convinced that no modification in the existing machinery of Government will improve matters. He urged that a change of spirit is the first condition of success and he suggested how the change of spirit could be brought about.

If only Mr. Montagu, could come to India as Viceroy when the Reform Bill comes into practice, all might be well, for he could then see what the actual obstacles are and take steps to remove them. There is the great force of Anglo-Indian officials who are not in love with change. They like power, as human

beings will. In my opinion, the only hope is for Mr. Montagu to come out to us, at any rate, for the next few years. Nobility of purpose and generous sympathy would then be able to do their work.

From England Tagore left for an extensive travel through the continent. After visiting Norway and Sweden he proposed to embark for America where his lectures had already attracted respectful attention.

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